

STATEMENT OF STEVE MARTIN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. RES. 468, SUPPORTING THE CONTINUED ADMINISTRATION OF CHANNEL ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK, INCLUDING SANTA ROSA ISLAND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAWS (INCLUDING REGULATIONS) AND POLICIES OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

May 16, 2006

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. Res. 468, supporting the continued administration of Channel Islands National Park, including Santa Rosa Island, in accordance with the laws (including regulations) and policies of the National Park Service.

Because S. Res. 468 is a Senate resolution that will not be signed into law, the Department is not taking a position on the resolution itself. However, the Department strongly agrees with the sentiment expressed by the resolution that the National Park Service (NPS) should continue to manage Channel Islands National Park, including Santa Rosa Island, in a manner that provides for protection of the park's resources and their enjoyment by visitors to the islands.

S. Res. 468 calls for the NPS to manage Santa Rosa Island, part of Channel Islands National Park, in a way that protects and allows interpretation of the natural, scenic, and cultural resources of the island and provides visitors with a safe and enjoyable park experience. It further states that the NPS should not be directed to manage Santa Rosa Island in a manner that would result in the public being denied access to significant portions of the island or that would be inconsistent with the responsibility of the NPS to protect native resources within the park.

We understand that S. Res. 468 is in response to repeated attempts in recent years to allow deer and elk, and associated hunting operations, to remain on Santa Rosa Island indefinitely. The current effort in this regard is language included in H.R. 5122, the National Defense Authorization for Fiscal Year 2007, which requires the Secretary of the Interior to stop the plan to remove the deer and elk from the island as required by a court-ordered settlement agreement. This provision would effectively overturn the 1998 settlement agreement, that the NPS is legally bound to, that requires the phaseout of non-native deer and elk over several years and their complete removal from the island by the end of 2011. Until the deer and elk are removed and the hunting operation ends, most of the island will remain closed to the public for significant portions of each year.

Channel Islands National Monument was designated in 1938 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt under the authority of the Antiquities Act. In 1980, the monument was expanded to include additional islands, including the 54,000-acre Santa Rosa Island, and redesignated as Channel Islands National Park. The park's purpose is to protect the nationally significant natural, scenic, wildlife, marine, ecological, archaeological, cultural, and scientific values of the five out of the eight California Channel Islands that comprise the park.

The question of whether to allow hunting in units of the National Parks System is decided by Congress on a case-by-case basis. Congress discussed the issue of the appropriateness of hunting on the Channel Islands during consideration of the legislation to redesignate Channel Islands National Monument as a national park in 1979 and 1980, and made a deliberate decision not to allow hunting there. We feel that this is still the appropriate decision today.

It is important to note that once it was determined that Santa Rosa Island was to be incorporated within Channel Islands National Park, Vail and Vicker's, Ltd. (V&V) requested that Santa Rosa Island be the highest priority for acquisition by the NPS. This was reflected in the enabling legislation. In 1986, the NPS purchased Santa Rosa Island for \$29.5 million from V&V, who retained a 25-year non-commercial reservation of use and occupancy covering a 7.6-acre area containing the ranch house and a nearby field. At the request of V&V, supported by members of Congress, the NPS issued a series of 5-year special use permits (SUPs) to allow V&V to continue their cattle ranching and elk and deer hunting operations.

In 1996, because of the impacts on endangered species and water quality issues, the National Parks Conservation Association sued the NPS. In 1997, V&V sued NPS to retain their current SUP and continue their operations until 2011. A three-way settlement agreement, entered into court in 1998, provided for removing the cattle by the end of 1998, which occurred on schedule, and for phasing out deer and elk, and removing them altogether by the end of 2011, when the V&V 25-year non-commercial reservation of the 7.6 acre ranch expires. The settlement agreement included two options under which hunting could continue. The parties chose the second option, which was to manage the deer and elk using adaptive management guidelines. Each year, the NPS, with recommendations from an agreed upon scientific panel, determines whether an accelerated reduction in either the deer or elk herds are necessary. Regardless of the management option, all deer and elk are to be removed by V&V no later than the end of 2011. At that time, V&V will be required to remove all their property, including any remaining deer and elk, which V&V owns.

It is necessary to end the hunting operation to open up the island for other recreational purposes, such as hiking, camping, and sightseeing, on a year-round basis. So long as a hunting operation continues, 90 percent of the island will be off limits for general recreation for four to five months of each year. After spending \$29.5 million to purchase the island and more to restore native plants and animals, the NPS has been eager to make this spectacular island available for full-time enjoyment by the general public.

Santa Rosa Island is currently the most accessible of the five islands that are part of Channel Islands National Park. It is the island where the NPS can most easily and cost effectively welcome American citizens who have physical disabilities, including our men and women in uniform who have become disabled in the service to our Nation.

Removal of the non-native deer and elk is necessary for native plants and animals to flourish on Santa Rosa Island, and to ensure that efforts spent on restoration are not wasted. Channel Islands National Park has been in the forefront of the NPS's efforts to control non-native species that out-compete the native species. The park has undertaken several successful ecological restoration programs. The eradication of introduced rats from Anacapa Island has resulted in the increased survivability of the Xantus's murrelet. The removal of introduced rabbits, cattle, sheep, and mules from Santa Barbara, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz and San Miguel Islands has allowed for vegetation restoration. Park staff, local communities, the Nature Conservancy, and the Montrose Trustees, who worked together to reestablish the American bald eagle were recently rewarded with the first eaglet born on the northern Channel Islands in 50 years, on Santa

Cruz Island. The NPS looks forward to more successes of this type in the Channel Islands, including Santa Rosa Island.

For all these reasons, the Department supports the continued implementation of the 1998 settlement agreement, so that the day will come, after 2011, when NPS will be able to manage Santa Rosa Island as Congress intended when Channel Islands National Park was established in 1980.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement. I will be happy to answer any questions you or members of the subcommittee may have.